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ABSTRACT

Since the Blue Ribbon Schools Program was established by the Secretary of Education in 1982, it has developed into a national school-improvement strategy. This brochure outlines the three purposes of the Blue Ribbon Schools Program: (1) identify and recognize outstanding public and private schools across the nation; (2) make research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools; and (3) encourage schools to share information about best practices based on a common understanding of criteria for educational success. The brochure also describes which schools are eligible for nomination, the process by which schools are chosen, the criteria used in the selection process, and the benefits of the program. States with their own recognition programs, based on criteria similar to those used by the Blue Ribbon Schools, are also listed. (LMI)

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Blue Ribbon Schools

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Blue Ribbon Schools

Elementary and Secondary School Recognition Programs

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Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

Blue Ribbon Schools Program

Purpose

Since the Blue Ribbon Schools Program was established by the Secretary of Education in 1982, it has developed into a national school improvement strategy. Many states now have related programs.

Today, the Blue Ribbon Schools Program serves three purposes. First, it identifies and recognizes outstanding public and private schools across the nation. Second, the Program makes research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so that they can assess themselves and plan improvements. Third, the Program encourages schools, both within and among themselves, to share information about best practices based on a common understanding of criteria related to educational success.

Blue Ribbon Schools are models of both excellence and equity. To be recognized, a school must demonstrate a strong commitment to educational excellence for *all* students. The Program welcomes applications from schools that have demonstrated sustained success in achieving these values, as well as schools that have overcome obstacles and can provide evidence of significant improvements.

Which Schools May Be Nominated?

Public and private schools serving grades K–12 from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of Defense Dependents Schools, may be nominated. Elementary and secondary schools are eligible to participate in alternate years.

Public and private schools must have been in operation for at least 5 years before applying to the program. Although schools may receive national recognition more than once, they must wait a minimum of 5 school years before they can reapply. Specific eligibility requirements can be found in the Program's nomination package.

How Are Schools Chosen?

Each state administers its own program for selecting public schools to be nominated to the national level. Chief state school officers make their nominations to the U.S. Department of Education. The number of schools each may nominate is indexed to the state's population. The Council for American Private Education nominates private schools, and officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Defense Dependents Schools nominate their schools.

A national review panel evaluates the nominations. The panel consists of 100 outstanding public and private school educators, college and university staffs, state and local government officials, school board members, parents, the education press, business representatives, and the general public. Experts from specific areas of special emphasis designated each year also serve on the review panel. Based on the quality of the application, the most promising schools are recommended for site visits. The purpose of a visit is to verify the accuracy of the information the school has provided in its nomination form and to gather any additional information the panel has requested. Experienced educators, including principals of previously recognized schools, visit and observe the schools for 2 days and submit written site visit reports. The panel considers the report and makes recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of Education, who then announces the names of the schools selected for recognition.

What Selection Criteria Are Used?

The review panel considers the following "Conditions of Effective Schooling" in each school:

- Student focus and support;
- Challenging standards and curriculum;
- Teaching and active learning;
- Learning-centered school contexts;
- Professional growth and collaboration;
- Leadership and organizational vitality; and
- School, family, and community partnerships.

The review panel also considers objective "Indicators of Success." This category includes:

- Student performance on measures of achievement;
- Daily student and teacher attendance rates;
- Students' postgraduation pursuits; and
- School, staff, and student awards.

Details of these eight categories of selection criteria are provided in the nomination form available through the nominating agencies.

Each year, a limited number of special emphases are designated. These represent areas where school performance needs to be greatly improved and where effective models are sought. Schools may choose to seek honors in one special emphasis area in addition to comprehensive recognition, but this is optional.

What Are the Benefits?

The Blue Ribbon Schools Program has proven to be effective in numerous ways:

- The nomination form provides a comprehensive framework of research-based criteria that schools can use to assess themselves and plan changes. The self-assessment is an opportunity to involve all relevant stakeholders in a common school improvement project.
- Recognition is a powerful energizer for recognized schools to make further improvements, and it stimulates other schools to continue their efforts to strive for national recognition.

- By publicly validating school improvement efforts, confidence in recognized schools increases. This often results in higher local funding for schools, greater parent and community involvement in education, and success in the search for outside funds and other resources.
- The public spotlight shines on recognized schools; often they are the subject of articles in national, state, and local publications. They are sometimes designated as the universe from which schools, teachers, or students are selected for special awards from business and industry.
- Recognized schools sometimes have opportunities to share their effective practices with other schools as well as to learn from other schools.

A National-State-Private Partnership

A total of 16 states and the District of Columbia, acknowledging the value of recognition as a school improvement strategy, have developed their own recognition programs. These state programs use criteria similar to the national Blue Ribbon Schools Program. Schools in these states generally achieve state recognition prior to national recognition.

States with their own recognition programs include:

- Arizona—A+ School Recognition Program
- Arkansas—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- California—Distinguished Schools Program
- Colorado—Schools of Excellence Program
- District of Columbia—Schools of Excellence Program
- Georgia—Schools of Excellence Program
- Hawaii—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Indiana—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Kentucky—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Maryland—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Michigan—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Missouri—Gold Star Schools Program
- New Jersey—Best Practices/Star Schools Program
- South Carolina—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- Texas—Successful Schools Awards Program
- Washington—Blue Ribbon Schools Program
- West Virginia—Schools of Excellence Program

Partnerships with education associations and corporations have also contributed greatly to the Program's success. Partners include the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and many private business corporations.

For More Information Contact Your Nominating Agency or write:

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Knowledge Applications Division
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Information about the Blue Ribbon Schools Program is also available on the U.S. Department of Education's Internet site. Direct your Web browser to http://www.ed.gov. Select "Search." Scroll down the page to "Blue Ribbon Schools," click, and follow the instructions to conduct a full text search of the database.

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